

Before the  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Implementing a Nationwide, Broadband,	)	
Interoperable Public Safety Network in	)	PS Docket No. 06-229
the 700MHz Band	)	WT Docket No. 96-86

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**COMMENTS OF THE FIRST RESPONSE COALITION**

Pursuant to the Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking<sup>1</sup> ("NPRM"), the First Response Coalition ([www.firstresponsecoalition.org](http://www.firstresponsecoalition.org)) hereby submits its comments in the above-referenced proceeding. The First Response Coalition ("FRC") is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization promoting the needs of America's first responders in the areas of communications interoperability and data/information preparedness. The FRC strives to ensure that decision makers attach a high priority to public safety issues. It works to foster greater cooperation and coordination between all levels of government, industry, and public safety agencies to protect our communities by providing emergency personnel with the tools and resources they need to coordinate a safe and effective emergency response. The FRC consists of tens of thousands of concerned citizens and first responders, as well as numerous community groups, who have joined our campaign because they understand that when we protect first responders we protect ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, *Implementing a Nationwide, Broadband, Interoperable Public Safety Network in the 700MHz Band*, PS Docket No. 06-229; WT Docket No. 96-86 (rel. Dec. 20, 2006)

## **DRAFT**

In the NPRM, the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) seeks comments on its comprehensive plan to promote the rapid deployment of a nationwide, interoperable, broadband public safety network, and thereby improve emergency responsiveness. The FRC applauds the high priority the FCC has placed on emergency services so that our first responders can more safely and effectively protect our communities. We support the FCC’s centralized and national approach to maximize public safety access to interoperable, broadband spectrum in the 700 MHz band, and appreciate this opportunity to offer the following comments on the future of public safety communications.

### **I. A STRATEGY FOR COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY**

The Commission seeks comment on the licensing of a single, national public safety entity for the provision of public safety broadband service in lieu of the traditional practice of licensing individual state and local jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup> The FRC agrees with the Commission’s assessment that centralizing the licensee responsibilities for a portion of the 24 MHz of spectrum earmarked for first responders into a single entity representative of the public safety community will best promote interoperable communications in the 700MHz band.

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<sup>2</sup> NPRM, ¶¶ 20-26, pp. 7-8.

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In comments submitted by the FRC in August 2006,<sup>3</sup> the FRC recommended that the FCC expand its role in creating a national strategy for interoperability. We believe the Commission's proposal for a nationwide, interoperable, broadband public safety network in the 700MHz band, including the licensing of a single, national public safety entity for the provision of public safety broadband service, is an important step in the right direction. The FRC agrees with the FCC that "A single, national network could provide a nationwide level of interoperability not achievable by an otherwise fragmented approach." <sup>4</sup> In designating a single, national public safety entity for the provision of public safety broadband service in lieu of the traditional practice of licensing individual state and local jurisdictions, the Commission will be lending much to the creation and implementation of a national strategy for interoperability.

The absence of a national strategy has resulted in disjointed efforts to solve the interoperability problem at all levels of government. As the FCC has noted, "while this system has had significant benefits for public safety users, in terms of permitting them to deploy voice and narrowband facilities suitable for their needs, the system also has resulted in uneven build-out across the country in different bands, balkanization of spectrum between

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<sup>3</sup> Comments of the First Response Coalition, *Recommendations of the Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Communications Networks* (EB Docket No. 06-119; August 2006)

<sup>4</sup> NPRM, ¶ 21, p. 8.

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large numbers of incompatible systems, and interoperability difficulties if not inabilities.”<sup>5</sup>

While the promotion of local knowledge is critical to achieving communications interoperability, it is clear that the nation’s over-reliance on the “bottom-up” approach is not working. The lack of a national strategy to coordinate investments in communications systems at the local and state level has left firefighters, police officers and emergency medical personnel throughout the country still unable to talk to one another. The federal government must take a more proactive approach to solving persistent communications problems that put the lives of first responders at risk.

The FCC’s centralized and national approach to providing an interoperable, broadband network in the 700 MHz band is the right approach. The FRC believes this addition of a national network to the typical public safety allocation model, where individual public safety agencies jurisdictions have been assigned individual licenses, can give first responders the best of both worlds. Designating a single licensee representative of the public safety community will do much to promote coordination among the tens of thousands of public safety agencies that, as the direct result of a lack of federal guidance, have been unable to coordinate their investments in compatible communications systems.

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<sup>5</sup> NPRM, ¶ 11, p. 6.

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The FCC's plan for establishing a nationwide, interoperable, broadband public safety network in the 700MHz band should be coupled with the establishment of a "date certain" by which to achieve communications interoperability. By providing strong federal leadership, such as the FCC has proposed, and a "date certain" for interoperability, national, state and local efforts can be better coordinated to meet this goal.

The FRC has called upon the President to establish a target date within the next decade to solve ongoing interoperability challenges so that first responders can more safely and effectively protect our communities.<sup>6</sup> Once the commitment to establishing a target date is announced, the White House should convene a National Interoperability Summit to best determine the appropriate date and begin developing a comprehensive interoperability implementation plan. A declarative national statement and directive from the highest levels of government is needed to mobilize and organize the interoperability efforts. Only by setting a target date for interoperability can the nation achieve this fundamental public safety goal, which provides for the common good. By harnessing the good work that already exists and focusing on the common target of full interoperability, real progress can be made. We believe the items outlined in the FCC's *Ninth Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* constitute critical components of a larger national strategy by which to achieve emergency communications interoperability.

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Steven Jones, Executive Director, First Response Coalition, to George W. Bush, President of the United States (June 19, 2006).

## II. THE EFFICIENT USE OF SPECTRUM

In addition, the FRC supports the Commission's comments regarding the efficient use of spectrum.<sup>7</sup> The FRC believes that particular focus should be placed on using spectrum more efficiently, and not solely on the continued allocation of additional spectrum that ignores recent and ongoing technological advances. Rapidly-evolving technology has allowed users to make more efficient use of limited spectrum, in many cases obviating the need for large, inefficient spectrum allocations.

The FCC's plan to use a portion of the 700 MHz spectrum set aside for first responders is sound, but efforts to do so should not disrupt the digital television (DTV) transition. Congress has established an efficient transition timeline for the 700 MHz spectrum and the FRC supports letting the process work.

As the Commission has noted, "permitting the national licensee to use narrowband public safety spectrum in the 700 MHz band on a secondary basis significantly could increase the amount of spectrum available for broadband public safety use."<sup>8</sup> Broadband technologies and services can help overcome long-standing communications interoperability problems faced by first responders. In addition, broadband services enable first responders to take advantage of potentially lifesaving technologies, helping them to more

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<sup>7</sup> NPRM, ¶ 25, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> NPRM, ¶ 39, p. 11.

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safely and effectively protect our communities. In a December 2005 report, the FCC described a national broadband network capable of providing first responder communications applications such as rapid-warning messages, real-time text-messaging and e-mail personnel status location, high-resolution digital images and “smart radios” that are capable of operating on multiple frequencies and multiple formats. The FRC believes that intelligent policies like those offered in the *Ninth Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, coupled with technological advances that make more efficient use of spectrum, are the best way to achieve the FCC’s vision of a nation-wide, interoperable broadband network for first responders.

### III. CONCLUSION

For too long, a lack of federal guidance, uncoordinated efforts between all levels of government, and insufficient funding have impeded efforts towards achieving communications interoperability. For the forgoing reasons, the FCC should pursue its efforts to implement a nationwide, broadband, interoperable public safety network in the 700MHz band as described above, and as outlined in the Commission’s *Ninth Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Steven Jones

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